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AT THE U.N.: A STEP AGAINST TERRORISM

ANNCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES AN IMPORTANT STEP AGAINST TERRORISM TAKEN LAST WEEK AT THE UNITED NATIONS:

VOICE: LAST FRIDAY THE LEGAL COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY TOOK A DECISIVE STEP TOWARD ENDING THE MOST PERNICIOUS ASPECT OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM. IT PASSED A RESOLUTION, SPONSORED BY WEST GERMANY AND THIRTY-SEVEN OTHER MEMBERS, WHICH WOULD ESTABLISH A PANEL OF NATIONS TO DRAFT A TREATY COMMITTING SIGNATORY GOVERNMENTS TO PREVENT THE TAKING OF HOSTAGES AND TO PUNISH THOSE WHO TAKE THEM.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN, OF COURSE, THAT A SOLUTION OF THIS MUCH-DEBATED PROBLEM LIES JUST AROUND THE CORNER. THE PANEL THAT IS TO BE FORMED MUST REACH AGREEMENT ON A TREATY, AND GIVE THE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION ON THE SUBJECT. THAT MAY TURN OUT TO BE A FORMIDABLE TASK. ALREADY THERE ARE THOSE WHO PREDICT THAT THE COMMITTEE'S WORK WILL BOG DOWN FOR YEARS IN FRUITLESS ARGUMENTATION. OTHERS BELIEVE THAT THE SUCCESS OF ITS PURPOSE WILL DEPEND ON SUCH EXTRANEOUS FACTORS AS THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CLIMATE AND A POSSIBLE SETTLEMENT OF THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT.

NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE REASONS TO BE ENCOURAGED BY LAST WEEK'S VOTE. FOR ONE THING, THE ACTION TAKEN IN THE LEGAL COMMITTEE WAS BY CONSENSUS, WHICH MEANS THAT PASSAGE BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IS A VIRTUAL CERTAINTY. AND, FOR ANOTHER, THE RESOLUTION WAS SUPPORTED BY A RARE COMBINATION OF WESTERN, SOVIET-AREA AND THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES---WHICH IN TURN REFLECTED BOTH A WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE AND A GENUINE AND GROWING CONCERN

ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF HOSTAGE-TAKING. IT ALSO SEEMED TO BEAR OUT THE PREDICTION OF SECRETARY-GENERAL KURT WALDHEIM THAT THE UNITED NATIONS IS MUCH MORE READY THAN IT ONCE WAS TO TAKE STEPS AGAINST TERRORISM.

WHETHER BY DESIGN OR NOT, THE RESOLUTION WAS PASSED BY THE LEGAL COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS DAY---THE TWENTY-EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE U.N.'S ADOPTION OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. WHEN THAT DECLARATION WAS ORIGINALLY ADOPTED, THE RIGHTS OF HOSTAGES MAY NOT HAVE BEEN UPPERMOST IN THE MINDS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS, FOR THE PROBLEM OF TERRORISM HAD NOT ASSUMED, IN THOSE DAYS, THE FORMIDABLE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS IT HAS NOW TAKEN ON. BUT THEY DID HAVE IN MIND, AMONG OTHERS, THE RIGHT OF PERSONS TO TRAVEL IN PEACE AND SECURITY FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER---AND THAT IS THE RIGHT WHICH THE THIRTY-FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY HAS NOW TAKEN THE FIRST STEP TO GUARANTEE.

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